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FROM : Amcengeneral JERUSALEM

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

April 2, 1958

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SUBJECT : Divided Councils - Part II

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The release from Jafar prison on March 20 of the eighteen prominent Mahlus leaders has occasioned many rumors and much speculation in West Jordan. Some of the more politically sophisticated Palestinians have intimated that they understand the possible significance of the release without having precisely articulated their thoughts. The heart of the matter of course is the Government's policy toward the opposition, in the past one of rather harsh suppression, with present indications that very prominent figures are urging a sensible accommodation instead. Just as in law the right of self defense limits one to using only so much force as is reasonably necessary to repel an attack, one might well ask why a government should use more than the barest minimum of repression necessary to maintain itself against internal dissidents.

The failure of the released men to call at the Palace for a kiss and make-up ceremony, as expected, is the root cause of most of the rumors. Some speculation has it that the Mahlusites received such an enthusiastic welcome at the outskirts of town on their return that they were encouraged to maintain their intransigent attitude. Other speculation from sources generally well informed has it that the release was purchased by a promise of future support for the regime. On March 31 Shahr MUKHISEN, Mutassarraf (Governor) of Mahlus, gave the reporting officer the following, and very likely the real, explanation of why the expected did not happen.

On the day the released men returned to Mahlus, Bahjat TABBAARA, Military Governor of Mahlus District (Muhaisem's superior), told the Mutassarraf that he was ordering the rearrest of Mashat al NASHRI, one of the eighteen, on the grounds that he still had sixteen days of a previously imposed sentence to serve. Muhaisem pleaded with Tabbara not to take this step, arguing that all the good will and more gained by the release would be lost. The Military Governor proved adamant however, and Muhaisem took the extreme step of calling Samir RIFAA'I, the Deputy Prime Minister, in the hope of having his bees overruled. Rifaa'i, in complete agreement, told Mutassarraf Muhaisem that although he regretted it very much the matter had been arranged and there was nothing he could do about it. Mashat went back to jail.

Muhaisem is sure that Tabbara did not have the authority on his own to order the rearrest and he has concluded, primarily from what Rifaa'i did not say on the telephone, that the villain of the piece was again Sulaiman TUQAN, the Court

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Minister. The Metasarrif said that not only the eighteen released men, but all the other important people in Mahlus district previously identified with the opposition had been prepared to call on the King and bygone were to have been declared bygone. Instead, because of Jabbara's vengeful act, only six of the ex-prisoners called at the Palace, and they only signed the guest book and left. Mahdum remarked wryly, "Politics is a dirty business."

The Metasarrif did not seem especially apprehensive that the lid could not be kept on but he stated that there was now a new and disturbing development which made it even more unfortunate that his efforts at reconciliation had failed. He has unmistakable evidence that the former followers of Hajj Auda HUSSEINI, the former "Grand" Mufti of Jerusalem, are surreptitiously grouping themselves, at the orders of Hajj Auda (read Egypt), into a potentially dangerous opposition. He described Mahlus Members of Parliament Fawq 'AMARINI and 'Abdul Rauf al FARIS as the leaders of this group. To hear the latter's name mentioned was particularly surprising inasmuch as al FARIS was recently plucked by the regime to fill one of the vacant Mahlus parliamentary seats. Mahdum mentioned that most of Hajj Auda's ex-followers have become in the past few years members of, or sympathizers with, the Communist and Ba'thi parties.

Mahdum explained, "These people are dangerous for three reasons, first because they have worked together before and know each other well, making it possible to work together without attracting suspicion. Secondly, a lot of Hajj Auda's people are in our C.I.D. and police. And third they have the trained assassins." Mahdum said reassuringly that he is keeping a close watch on the new group and plans rapid transfers or dismissals for any C.I.D. people whom he suspects of working with the new group.

COMMENT: While Hajj Auda has lost much of his luster, he still casts a long shadow in unhappy Palestine. It is easier for real goons simple to speculate what might happen if one of his former trigger men could succeed in depotching King Husseini. For this reason, the new grouping of ex-followers of Hajj Auda is considered to be infinitely more dangerous than the relatively civilized Mahlus opposition politicians such as the al Maris and Shak'as. A working arrangement between the new Hajj Auda group and the already discredited Mahlus politicians, moreover, could well develop into a really dangerous opposition, making it all the more necessary that the Government move rapidly for rapprochement with the latter group. The King might be able to forestall trouble in the future if he could be brought to inquire whether his Court Minister, Salim al TUGAY, is primarily interested in selfishly maintaining his own status rather than in promoting the interests of the regime.

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